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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to: (1) investigate the use of special education services in grades 1-3 by 48 children who had attended Head Start, (2) to investigate the use of special education services by a matched group of 48 children who were eligible for but had not attended Head Start, and (3) to compare the differences between the two groups in the use of special education services. It was hypothesized that there would be no differences between the two groups. The Iowa City School District provided four types of special education services: speech therapy, remedial reading, psychological services, and classes for the educable mentally retarded. Based on the data collected, children from the Head Start group used more special education services than children from the non-Head Start group. The one exception to this finding was related to use of classes for the educable mentally retarded. The data revealed that only one child of the 48 pairs had been placed in a class for the mentally retarded. Possible reasons for the results of this study are discussed. (Author/CS)

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HEAD START: DOES IT REDUCE THE USE OF SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES IN GRADES 1 - 3?

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to:(1) investigate the use of special education services in grades 1 through 3 by 48 children who had attended Head Start, (2) investigate the use of special education services by a matched group of 48 children who were eligible for but had not attended Head Start, and (3) compare differences between the two groups use of special education services.

This study was conducted in Iowa City, Iowa. The Iowa City School District offers four types of special education services: speech therapy, psychological services, remedial reading and classes for the mentally retarded.

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HEAD START: DOES IT REDUCE THE USE OF SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES IN GRADES 1 - 3?

During the past decade, both laymen and professional educators have become increasingly aware that chronic school failure begins early, and that there are numbers of children to whom school life offers nothing but defeat almost from its beginning (Wilkerson and Gordon, 1966; Smith and Bissell, 1970; Blatt and Garfunkel, 1968; Butler, 1970). These are children whose life experiences prior to entering school have not prepared them to meet the demands of a curriculum designed with other more privileged children in mind. Accumulating experimental and pragmatic evidence suggests that such a state of affairs is not inevitable. A period of preschooling, designed to develop specific skills which provide readiness for kindergarten, compensate for background experiences that do not provide school readiness skills (Wilkerson and Gordon, 1966).

One of the preschool programs that has gained national recognition has been Project Head Start. Frost and Thomas (1971) described Project Head Start as a program for helping children of limited opportunity who are to enter kindergarten or first grade in the Fall following participation in the program. Recognizing that children from low income homes often arrive at school under distinct handicaps, the originators of Head Start designed the program to evaluate and meet the special needs of disadvantaged children.

This study was conducted in 1972-73 in Iowa City, Iowa. The purpose was to: (1) investigate the use of special education services in grades 1 through 3 by 48 children who had attended Head Start, (2) investigate the use of special education services by a matched group of 48 children who were eligible for but

had not attended Head Start and (3) compare differences between the two groups' use of special education services. The Iowa City School District provided four types of special education services: speech therapy, remedial reading, psychological services and classes for the educable mentally retarded.

The subjects in this study were divided into the Head Start and the non-Head Start group. The students in each group consisted of 21 females and 27 males. The breakdown of the students by grades consisted of 14 first graders, 18 second graders and 16 third graders.

The children in the Head Start group were selected from the Head Start records of enrollment for the period of 1967 to 1971. Due to the high rate of mobility, a characteristic ascribed to the disadvantaged by Crow (1966), 15 of the children originally selected for the Head Start group were no longer attending school in the Iowa City School District. The schools were then asked to identify children who were enrolled in the Iowa City schools who had attended Head Start. Replacement subjects were then added replacing those children who had attended Head Start but had since moved out of the community.

In selecting the non-Head Start group care was taken not to include children who might have participated in Head Start in other communities. The non-Head Start group was selected using the following criterion as guidelines:

1. Children who had not attended Head Start classes.
2. Children who attended a Title I school funded under the elementary and secondary education act of 1965.
3. Children who could be matched with the Head Start group on the variables of sex, years in school, age and reading scores from the Metropolitan Readiness Tests and Metropolitan Achievement Tests.
4. Children who participated in the free or reduced price lunch programs.

For the purpose of gathering the data it was first necessary to match up

pairs of students - those with Head Start experience were matched with students who had no previous Head Start experience. A total of 48 pairs were formed. Four variables were used to match the students: age, sex, years of school attendance and results of the Metropolitan Reading Readiness Tests and Metropolitan Achievement Tests depending on which test the child had taken.

The sign test was used to record the data. For the purpose of this investigation, a (+) sign was used when the Head Start group had used a particular service and the non-Head Start group had not used the service. A (-) sign was used to designate situations where the non-Head Start group individual of the matched pair had used a particular service, and the Head Start individual had not. When both matched subjects used the same service or when neither had used the services, the pairs were ignored for the purpose of analysis.

For the purpose of gathering the data, two methods were employed. Children who had used psychological services had records on file with the director of special education. The records were examined to determine whether children of either group had used or were receiving psychological services in grades 1 - 3. Students who received psychological services were referred by the teacher to the psychologist. Categories for referral were: Behavior, Social, and Academic Problems.

To determine which students had received speech therapy, remedial reading or placed in a class for the educable mentally retarded, a form was developed requesting information about each student. These forms were sent to speech therapists, remedial reading teachers, and teachers of the mentally retarded in the field. They were asked to indicate whether any of the children in either group had received or was at that time receiving a special education service.

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RESULTS

Based upon the data collected, children who formed the Head Start group used more special education services than did the non-Head Start group. There was one exception, and that was use of classes for the educable mentally retarded. The data revealed that only one child of the 48 matched pairs had been placed in a class for the mentally retarded. That child came from the non-Head Start group.

The use of each of the special education services used by the Head Start and non-Head Start groups was as follows:

1. Speech therapy: Of the 18 pairs of subjects using this service, 15 of these pairs were ones in which the Head Start child received the service, while in only 3 of these pairs was it the non-Head Start child who used this service. A probability level of chance was found to be .008.

2. Remedial reading: Of the 21 pairs of subjects for which one member of the pair received the service and the other did not, 17 of these pairs were ones in which the Head Start child received the service, while in only 4 of these pairs was it the non-Head Start child who used this service. A probability level of chance was found to be .012.

3. Psychological services: Of the 15 pairs of subjects for which one member of the pair received the service and the other did not, 12 of these pairs were ones in which the Head Start child received the service, while in only 4 of these pairs was it the non-Head Start child who used this service. A probability level was found to be .035.

4. Classes for the mentally retarded: There was not sufficient use of this service to warrant determining a level of probability. That this occurred is probably related to two causes: (1) Iowa City is an atypical community that

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has a low representation of culturally and ethnically different people of low income status; (2) Pupil Personnel Services provide ancillary and supportive services to the classroom teachers. This enables children who might ordinarily be placed in classes for the mentally retarded to remain in the regular class.

CONCLUSION

The hypothesis assumed at the beginning of this research was that "There would be no difference between students who had attended Head Start and those who had not in the amount of special education services used in the first three years of school."

The results of this study have proved this hypothesis to be incorrect. There are three possible reasons why this might have occurred:

1. Children who attended Head Start can be identified by classroom teachers prior to the child entering school. In Iowa City this information could be gained through the school round-up registration, school cumulative folders, and from siblings who are in the school. Although this study did not investigate teacher attitudes towards children from low socio-economic backgrounds, there is research evidence that teacher's attitudes and their class programs can make it difficult for the Head Start child to succeed (Wolff, 1967; Holmes and Holmes, 1966). This research suggested that in some situations Head Start children come to school eager to learn but because of the attitude of some teachers towards children from low socio-economic backgrounds, the child is not a "welcomed" member of the class. The research further suggested that many Head Start programs have a "laissez faire" attitude towards discipline, with free movement and talking in the classes encouraged. This has not been well received in many

public school classrooms.

A point for consideration would be that Head Start children proved "troublesome" to some classroom teachers and that may have evidenced itself in the use of special education special services by the child. This may have been particularly the case in the use of psychological services where the referrals were made by the classroom teacher and one category for referrals was "Individual Behavior Problems."

2. Another point for consideration is that the Head Start group might have received more special education services than they required. This phenomenon usually occurs when an individual group is more easily identified. In this case, the fact that the children had attended Head Start, and were identifiable, might have resulted in more referrals for special education services.

3. Head Start has among its stated objectives the goals to help prepare children for school entry and school success. These should be considered longitudinal objectives. Early identification and remedial services provided early in the child's school career may serve to help the child remain in school and to accomplish more over an extended period of time. Hence, the possibility should be considered that early referral and remedial services will prove to be advantageous to the child during his school career.

One has to question if the results of this study would have been different had this study been conducted in a non-university community that reflected more diversified industry and a broader representation of ethnic and racial groups. A categorical answer of "yes" or "no" cannot be given to this question. Some of the children who qualified were children of students enrolled at the university. Also, Iowa City does not have a large population of ethnic or racial minorities.

Although one could speculate if the results of this study would have been different in other communities, this does not negate the findings of this study.

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